3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

252
412
291

6, 7. Pounding maize

342

[facing p. 33]

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

351 old Ngoni families, and shining like marble, as did the hut and veranda floors. On this polished space, or else on the 574 veranda, the child's grandmother sat when callers had been announced, and from that vantage-point she could command the entrance through the surrounding fence, and agree to receive callers who had asked for admittance. Also in front 417 of the hut was another drying platform which was large enough to offer shelter from the sun in hot weather; the 343 dovecot where the 'royal pigeons' lived if the household was [235] of the royal clan or distinguished enough to aspire to keep- [554] ing pigeons. Off to one side was a hut for the goats at night and another, hoisted up on a platform, for the poultry. On the other side of the main hut were the grain stores, built up on low platforms. The maize stores were up to ten feet high and ten feet in diameter in these big households, and well-to- [556] do women would have four or five of them bulging with maize cobs. There were smaller circular mudded bins for ground-nuts and millet. Behind the hut were two or three small huts where some of the helpers slept, and one of them 351 was generally a kitchen hut. Piles of wood, and bundles of [284] thatching grass bound neatly with bark rope, were stacked against the fence.

There were innumerable objects around the compound of 351 interest to the small child prowling about. Two or three tall ●412 wooden pounding mortars, so heavy that they could not be lifted and had to be trundled on their circular base from one place to another, stood near the kitchen hut, or were moved to the front if the women pounding had to watch children there. There were much smaller mortars for pound- ing ground-nuts, kept when not in use in the fenced-in veranda; and one or more large flat stones for grinding finger millet and bulrush millet. Baskets were of all sizes and shapes 351 from the small round food basket with a lid in which father's 415 food was carried to the kraal gate, to the wide shallow win- nowing baskets, the deep round carrying baskets some as large as two feet in diameter, and the porous baskets used as

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

the older herd-boys when they were discussing 'cattle problems' in the evening. They took them into the kraal and showed them signs of the cattle not being well from the condition of the skin, udders, hoofs and mouth. The older boys were also called to be present if medicine was given to cattle, either some specific known to the owners, or treatment given by a 'specialist' called in, who might have real skill and knowledge about sick animals or be trying his luck with secret remedies known only to himself. The herd-boys were taught to notice the condition of other cattle than the ones of which they had charge, and to report on them. These might be cattle in other villages, or cattle belonging to their father's house 'boarded out' in another kraal according to Ngoni practice. The older herd-boys went with their father and his brothers to local markets where cattle were bought and sold, and listened to arguments about their condition which could make a difference of several pounds in the price they fetched.

When it had been decided in the village to kill a beast, for eating, or for selling the meat, or for a sacrifice, it was usually a young adult who was called to spear the animal. Some young men became adept at planting the spear behind the left shoulder in such a way that the beast dropped dead at once. At times two or more stabs were necessary, but it was a matter of pride and no small skill to succeed the first time. The senior herd-boys, who had driven the animal out of the kraal after separating it from its fellows, stood close round and watched attentively, for the stab had to be both accurate and forceful. The reputation of being skilful at killing a beast, of being a 'one stab' man, was greatly desired by herd-boys. They coveted equally the reputation of being skilful at flaying the beast. With carefully sharpened knives, in a few quick deft strokes, the young men slit the skin, opened it up and began to cut up the carcase. Like assistants at a surgical operation, the senior herd-boys held the knives, lifted a limb, turned back the skin, collected the blood, removed the

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

been warned ahead to pound maize and make yeast of sprouting finger millet. They then embarked on a three-day cooking programme in large pots over a log fire in the compound. 'Sweet' beer with a low alcoholic content was drawn off after the first cooking, and the rest was left to simmer and ferment until it was of the correct thickness, flavour, and alcoholic strength.

Ngoni women's crafts

Formerly when the Ngoni used leather for clothing, their women took over the skins after they had been dressed, rubbed in fat and oil to make them soft, and darkened them with charcoal made of maize stalks. They then cut and sewed the circular skirts which had a number of gores. The use of cloth, bought first from the Arabs and later from European and Indian traders, entirely replaced the former leather clothing, but senior Ngoni women still had a strong preference for a heavy dark blue cloth which they thought resembled the former leather.

Two special skills were maintained by high-born Ngoni families and they carefully trained their girls in them. One was the use of beads, threaded and sewn together to form standardized geometrical patterns, many of which had particular significance as denoting a leaf, an eye, a horn of a cow. These beads of different sizes in strong colours of red, yellow, green, blue, as well as black and white, were made into headbands, wristlets, belts, collars, and the bead 'waistcoats' worn by the men in their war-dances. Each Ngoni bride expected to take to her new home at least one food basket which she had elaborately embroidered with beads in these standard designs.

The other skill to which we have referred more than once was that of beauty treatment. Ngoni women despised and disliked the local custom of facial markings and body markings. They treated their skin with clarified fat or butter, and combed their hair with long thorns or bone combs. After

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

482
291
342
285

28. Learning to carry wood

252
412
291

29. Learning to pound

[facing page 145]

5: Allan C-5 (1941) 1949 FR5 Ngoni FR5 Mpezeni Lamba FQ8 Maravi FR4

In demarcating the Reserves three assumptions were made; that populations would prove sufficiently fluid to adapt themselves to the altered circumstances and to attain an equitable distribution in relation to the available land, that artificial water supplies would be provided on a scale sufficient to allow of such a distribution and that improvement in methods of agriculture would be sufficiently rapid to compensate for land loss and to provide for increasing populations. However reasonable these assumptions may have been at the time, none has been verified by events. The boundaries of tribes and chieftaincies remained static, there was little or no migration from over-populated to under-populated areas and in one instance congestion was aggravated by immigration from outside the Territory. The systems of land usage tended to degenerate rather than to improve, partly owing to increasing pressure on the land and partly because of migration of the men to the centres of employment. It was assumed too that adequate agricultural and water development services would be provided, and it proved beyond the resources of the country to provide such services in time to meet the need.

As a result of these factors, some of which could not have been foreseen owing to the lack of adequate data at the time, and some of which, like the economic depression and its effect on territorial finances, were unpredictable, extreme maldistribution arose in some parts of the Reserves. By 1941 more than half of the people within the Native Reserves of the four districts were living under conditions of more or less acute land shortage in relation to the land needs of their traditional sytems, and very considerable areas were in process of rapid degeneration.

There is now little point in discussing whether or not the application of measures for agricultural improvement could have solved the problems of over-concentration without transfer of populations. In all probability no measure which would have been practicable could have met the case. The agriculture of a people can be rapidly developed only if three factors are present together; the means, the incentive and the will. Throughout the area we are discussing these factors were and for that matter still are, to a large extent absent. Except for local concentrations of cattle among the Ngoni, Chewa and eastern Senga, stock are lacking or negligible in numbers. The only implements are the hoe and the axe. A high proportion of the able bodied men are away at work, and the main source of income is from local employment by Europeans or the fraction of the wages of migrant labour which returns to the villages. With one or two local exceptions there are no cash crops sufficiently remunerative to compete with the attraction of the labour centres or to act as an incentive and provide the means for agricultural improvement. Nor was there any will to adopt new, incomprehensible and laborious methods while great areas of land, formerly in the possession of the people, remained empty and unused. This psychological factor alone would have defeated, and where it was attempted did defeat, all efforts at agricultural improvement. In addition, throughout most of the cattle areas of the Eastern Province population concentrations had reached such a level that even the immediate general adoption of an advanced system

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

754 695 791 to hide his household goods for, says he, "How do we know we shall return from there." And all their beads are taken off. When they see the sun is beginning to rise, every one assembles. And then they begin to pick out some strong young men, saying, "So and so must stay behind, and so and so, they must look after their companions and keep guard over the village, lest the medicine man's children begin to pillage the property of them who do not die." And then they begin to set out to go to the spot the poison is to be drunk at, and they [412] carry in readiness a grain mortar and a pestle (just any mortar), and follow the path in single file, and come to where the witch doctor is, and he begins to arrange them in a line; they do not turn their backs to the sun, the women spread out in one line, the men in another. The place is black with people. [292] The medicine man has his feather head-dress on, and goat's-hair bands are round his wrists. And then some old man gets up to present that for which the medicine is pounded, perhaps a goat, and this is for opening his bag [where he keeps the poison].

III. Thereupon the doctor says, "Give to me the spirit of the dead." Then that old man gets up, and going up to the village chief, tells him "The doctor is seeking the spirit of the dead." And the chief speaks, saying, "Well, and know you not them who have died here?" And then the old man gives him, the doctor, the spirit, saying, "Here so and so, and so and so have died, and it is on their account we summon you." Then the pounder of the poison says, "Give to me the partakers of human flesh who have eaten these ones you name." And then they call up two people, a man and a woman, saying, "Let her of the race of the Hills, and him of such and such a clan come here." And them they thus called come and stand near the mortar. Then

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959
FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

PLATE XIV

291
412
857
516

3. Boys crushing ground-nuts. The expressed oil will be used in a bird trap

524
857
516

4. Boy playing with a toy motor-car made from maize stalks

NGONI

[Facing P.209]

/8 cont'd/

285 the porridge inside warm. For straining beer, a special wide mesh basket is used, either conical or hemispherical in shape. Round and rectangular baskets of various sizes, with flat lids, are also found [482] and are used for carrying small quantities of food on a journey.

In former times, wooden plates were used, but these are now 415 very rare. Wooden spoons are still made and used, and large flat 417 porridge stirrers, with geometrical ornamentation, are common. [531] Wooden hemispherical pats, with a handle, are used for smoothing cooked porridge.

412 At the back of the hut, or on the verandah outside, are the pestle and mortar used for reducing maize and other cereals to flour. Mortars range in height from one to four feet, the smaller mortars being used by children or for crushing ground-nuts. They are usually of about one foot in diameter, and are made from single blocks of wood, usually from Afzilia quanzensis or Monotes trees. The inside of the block is hollowed out to leave a receptacle for the maize that is nearly as deep as the mortar is high. The only decoration is [531] a ridge of wood about an inch wide left encircling the base three or four inches from the ground. Pestles are undecorated cylinders of wood, made from Terminalia sericea or Kigelia pinnata trees. They may be as much as six feet long, and range in thickness from four [504] inches down to the half-inch pestles used by young children playing at pounding.

The hard residue of maize that cannot be reduced to flour by pounding is ground between two stones, and these grinding stones are also kept in the hut. Not every woman has her own grindstones [426] or her own pestle and mortar, and these objects are loaned and borrowed within the village.

Most huts contain some form of chair or stool, but these are 352 sometimes very small indeed, standing only two inches off the ground. Petrol boxes are used to sit on, and deck chairs, known in the vernacular as "sleeping chairs," are common. Carpenters make [463] a small folding chair that is fairly common. European upright chairs, basket chairs and Morris chairs are sometimes seen, but these are not made locally.

/8 cont'd/

352 Beds are owned in general by the younger generation only, and then at the rate of one per household. Otherwise, everyone sleeps on the floor on a reed mat. During the day, the mat is rolled 285 up except when needed for drying flour in the sun. These mats are made from reeds that grow near streams. The reeds are split in four, and are threaded with a thin rope made from the inner bark of the nzizi tree. Wooden headrests are now a rarity, and if any 513 [77] headrests at all is used, it is a European pillow. Blankets, quilts and, less frequently, sheets, are bought from stores.

/9/ V

412 The chief tool for use in the garden is the hoe. Ruins of fur- [325] naces for smelting iron ore are still to be seen, but are not now used, [567] and are said to have been worked in the old days only by Chewa slaves. Hoe blades are bought in the stores, and hafted with a handle made in the village. Handle making is a man's job, but one that every man knows how to do. Axes are made from blades bought in the store, or else from a worn down hoe blade, with a home-made handle. Adzes are used for mortar making, and young boys make miniature adzes as toys. A pointed blade hafted on to the end of a straight handle is used for making holes in the ground when building.

493 Sledges and, less commonly, unarticulated carts with solid [241] wheels are made for transporting the harvest from the fields to the village, and for collecting firewood. These are pulled by cattle, [493] not always oxen, using simple yokes made of wood and sinew, with a wooden drawbar.

224 Hunting is carried on in the dry season, particularly towards the end, when the grass burns easily. Guns of varying degrees of 411 antiquity are used, but none of these are made by Ngoni, although the Chewa still make guns. On a hunt, the rank and file are armed with throwing spears and knobkerries. The gun carriers walk about 224 two hundred yards in front of the main body, who are spread on a single line at right angles to the line of advance. The leader of